



Project Case Study Canal-side Planting and Art Project

Rosemary Works Community Association

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1 Background

This project idea began in early summer 2009, when one of the community members from Rosemary Works, took part in and clean up of the local canal area, organised by the Capital Clean-Up Campaign. At the clean-up event, the community member expressed a desire to initiate a longer-term project to improve the local environment along the canal side. Coincidentally, the Capital Clean-Up Campaign Partnership was inviting community groups to lead projects that converted underused public sites into green spaces.

The recently formed **Rosemary Works Community Association** (RoWCA) **was eager to get involved** in running a community project, and in no time the RoWCA Planting and Art Project was conceived. A project proposal was written and RoWCA was selected as one of 3 pilot projects and was awarded a grant of £3,000 from the Capital Clean-Up Campaign Partnership. A further £450 was awarded by the O2 Community Fund.

Context

RoWCA viewed the project as an **opportunity to build community links and relationships through shared action** – the planting of a flower and wildlife garden on the canal side would bring local people together and **increase community interaction and cohesion**.

Additional benefits, linking to larger local and national agendas, include the following:

- Providing **vital habitat** for wildlife and increasing biodiversity
- Links to urban agriculture and **community growing projects**
- Communities **taking responsibility** for public space
- Inter-generational activity
- **Increasing volunteering** and civic participation
- Links to a wide variety of **key local targets** from the Hackney Local Area Agreement

The canal side has so much potential as both a haven for wildlife and general public. Sadly, parts of London's canals suffer from anti-social behaviour, including graffiti and litter, making them less welcoming for public use.

Introduction to the case study

This case study is solely focussed on the process up to, and including, the construction and planting of the first phase of flower beds. The aims of the case study are:

- To explain **what we did**/what the process involved
- To identify **key factors** that made the project successful so that other groups can make best use of our experience

Our hope is that our project will be an inspiration to both British Waterways, and other community groups across the country, to follow our example and care for their local public space. affected.

Project Aims

The Project aims to use the beautification of the area by planting to achieve the following:

- **Increase community involvement**, e.g. participation in regular volunteering
- **Improved local environmental quality**, making the canal-side more welcoming for public use
- **Inspire other communities** to also take on and manage an area of public space

Project Overview

The original idea for the project was to combine planting and art (Rosemary Works has many resident artists and is one half of the Rosemary Briggs Creative Network). From the outset it was a **multi-organisation partnership, which was led by RoWCA**, and project managed by community members.

Key Intended Outcomes

Short-term Outcomes

Beautification of the Area

- Local people and general canal users say that they are pleased to see how the area now looks and appreciate the planting and the artwork. In short, **the area looks much better!**

Increase in biodiversity

- Lots of **different plants** growing,
- Increased **habitat** and food for wildlife

Community Involvement

- Increased **skills in the community** especially gardening skills
- Increased levels of **volunteering and active citizenship**
- Increased **inter-group and inter-generational contact**

Deliverable Targets

- At least **30 community volunteers** involved in the project
- The entire area for the project is cleared, prepared and planted so that it creates a **beautiful display**
- Plantings are **maintained by local community** volunteers
- **Artwork** from local artists on display in a public space
- Community members use the funding as **seed capital** to start and bring in additional funding to continue / expand the project
- One class from local **Whitmore primary school** involved from design stage
- An end of project **report and evaluation** that is helpful to other organisations who are interested in doing similar things





Who was involved

Rosemary Works Community Association

The Rosemary Works Community Association (RoWCA) is an unincorporated association. It represents the formalisation of a long history of community activity, amongst the Rosemary Works building tenants and into the wider local community. There is more info about RoWCA on our website: www.rowca.com

RoWCA has the following core aims:

- To develop and foster the community within Rosemary Works
- To build on the existing links into the wider community of Hackney so that RoWCA can make a greater positive contribution to the local community

Capital Clean-up Campaign Partnership

The Capital Clean-Up Campaign, www.capitalcleanup.co.uk, aims to create a cleaner and greener London in the lead up to the 2012 Olympic Games, by encouraging the public to actively contribute towards improving their local environment and taking 'ownership' of public spaces. The Capital Clean-Up Partnership provided funds for three pilot projects, which supported communities in converting underused public spaces into green community spaces. The pilot projects are used as a model to provide inspiration and best practice for replication of similar projects across London.

British Waterways

British Waterways (BW) is the organisation responsible for the management and maintenance of the canal network in Britain. They are the landowner for the project site, and the project had to get approved at the highest levels within the organisation.

London Borough of Hackney

The planting area is on the Hackney side of its border with Islington. LB Hackney have been involved in the project from the start, and provided great support including donating more than 3 tonnes of compost.

Rosemary Briggs Creative Network (RBCN)

RBCN is a creative network of artists and artisans from the Rosemary Works and Thomas Briggs buildings. The 2 beautiful old buildings face each other across the canal and the communities have united to develop the creative energy of the area. Artists and artisans from RBCN are creating art-work which will be a part of the ongoing project development.

Whitmore Primary School

Whitmore Primary School is just down the road from the project sight. RoWCA approached the school to see if they would like to be involved, and they immediately said they would love to be a part. A class of yr 3 children were identified to be involved.



Evaluation Plan

We designed an evaluation process that would answer the following key questions:

1. How was the project implemented?
2. Was the project successful in beautifying the area and increasing biodiversity?
3. Did the project successfully engage volunteers?

There were 5 data sources we planned to use:

- Project information from RoWCA
- Key informant interviews with participating agencies
- Interviews before and after the project with people using canal towpath
- Short questionnaire for volunteers
- Biodiversity audit (non-scientific)

Logic model

A logic model shows in a diagram form, what you are going to do, and what short-term outcomes you are expecting to have (a copy of our logic model is in Appendix A).



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Key Enablers and Challenges

Key Enablers

Effective engagement of community and partners

Engagement with the local community laid the foundation for the success of the project, and we placed a great emphasis on all aspects of the engagement process.

Access to managers from partner organisations and buy-in from senior management

Throughout the project we benefited from the involvement of senior managers from the partner organisations. Both in British Waterways and LB Hackney, there were senior managers who knew about the project and were able to help keep it moving forward.

Awareness of the context for the project and how it links to local and national agenda and targets.

Part of the reason for the strong support from partners was that the project was framed so as to fit in with existing priorities for those organisations.

Range of expert skills within RoWCA

RoWCA is a very unusual organisation because of the diversity of skills and experience in the community; which include the following:

- A full range of creative industries, including photographers, painters, sculptors, film makers
- 2 professional joiners as well as several competent amateur carpenters
- A community development professional, who has particular expertise on community engagement

The range of skills meant we were able to negotiate all potential barriers and had the resources in-house to deliver all aspects of the project. The one area of expertise we did not have was in planting, and so we engaged several professional horticulturalists to help us at different stages.

Key Challenges

The Nature of a pilot

There are a particular set of challenges when you are running a pilot project. In this case the pilot aspect was the planting up and maintenance of canal side that had never previously been done by community members in this way.

Needing to reach agreement with British Waterways

BW owned the land that we wanted to plant and maintain, and so of course we had to secure permission and support. This would be true of any public planting project, whether the landowner is the Council or another large organisation such as a water board. **Large organisations typically make decisions slowly** as there are lots of procedures to apply and many different groups and departments need to be involved.

Managing a multi-agency partnership

Multi-agency projects can often be a “partnership” in name only. It can be **hard to reconcile different needs and views**; for example the funder, the council, the community members and the landowners all have different perspectives. And that is not taking into account how within one organisation there will also often be a wide range of views.

Timeline for the pilot project

The timeline was a challenge in a variety of ways. Firstly the project was a 9-month project where the funding was announced in September. This does not coincide with the natural planting cycle, as much of the project time was in winter. Given the length of time it took to negotiate the details with British Waterways, the majority of the project time was taken up in the set-up phase, which meant there was limited time available for the construction of beds for planting in the spring.

Maintaining volunteer enthusiasm

As the negotiations with BW took many months to conclude, there was a real challenge of **how to keep volunteers interested and engaged**, while there was nothing really to do. It was also a challenge to **manage people’s expectations** in regard to how fast things would move forward.



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The Set-up and Planning Process

Engagement

- Engagement Strategy and Plan
 - Before starting the engagement we spent time looking at the **strategy** we wanted to follow, and then we made a **plan of how we would engage the different organisations and individuals** we needed to make the project a success.
- Community and Volunteer Engagement
 - This aspect of the project was ongoing throughout. We started with a **core group** of community members and as the project developed more and more people got involved.
- Partner Engagement
 - Meetings were held with the **key project partners** (British Waterways, LB Hackney and the Capital Clean-Up Partnership). There were **regular phone calls and emails** to project partners throughout the development stage to keep them informed on progress.
- Supplier Engagement
 - We made a list of all supplies we would need for the project and then did internet research to identify the cheapest suppliers. We then had conversations with managers from the different suppliers to negotiate discounts on the prices. In every case we were able to get a discount, ranging from 5%-35%.



Project Management

At the outset we identified **one person from RoWCA to be the project manager**. It took a significant amount of project management time over the months of negotiations, and it involved the following aspects:

- All **communications** with funders and other project partners
- Writing **briefings** for RoWCA on the progress
- **Facilitating** project planning meetings
- **Design** of all project documents such as the risk assessment and method statement
- Managing the **engagement** of community volunteers
- **Organising** and planning the construction phase
- **Negotiating** discounts from suppliers

Reaching Agreement with British Waterways

The most challenging aspect of the project was the securing of the necessary agreement from British Waterways. This was a very useful lesson in what it can take to make this kind of negotiation with a large organisation. It ended up taking **almost 8 months to negotiate the agreement**.

Quite rightly, British Waterways though supportive in principal, were conscious from the start that as a pilot of this sort of community involvement it needed to be done in a way that could then be repeated. There were no existing systems or processes that could be followed - **we were creating the road-map** for others to follow.

It took **many months of persistence** and a lot of phone calls and emails from the RoWCA project manager and from the funders to finally get approval. As part of the process the British Waterways General Manager for London came on a site tour, with 4 other colleagues from different departments.

A risk assessment and a method statement were drafted, and agreed by all partners. This was a key stage in the process as we then had a structure for what would happen, and how it would happen safely.

Planning and Design

Meetings

A large number of meetings were held over several months to design the landscaping of the project. In the end, we had to make several plans to accommodate changing requirements from British Waterways. At most of the meetings we had experienced gardeners present who were able to give advice on practical matters. All **decisions were made by consensus**, and we discussed different options before agreeing a course of action.

Design considerations

- Ease of **sustainable maintenance** – we wanted to design a planting that is easy and practical to maintain.
- **Enhancing the experience** of being on the canal side. This involved planting lots of flowers that made it a beautiful to look at, and others that released fragrances.
- **Supporting bio-diversity**. Rosemary Works on the South side of the canal (home of RoWCA) is already a local biodiversity rich hotspot. We wanted to explore ways of using both planting and the landscaping to provide habitat niches and opportunities for wildlife.
- Something that looks good **all year**. We wanted to plant with the seasons in mind so that at all times of year something is going on.
- It had to not be in the way of other canal users and be able to be **safely maintained** by community members.

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Implementation and Evaluation

Construction and Planting

The lumber was cut and prepared into the frames for the beds, by two community members (one of whom is a professional joiner). It took a full day to prepare all the frames. The site was then made level, as we needed a roughly flat surface so that the beds would sit straight and look good. This took a group of about 8 community members 3 hours to complete, supported by British Waterways' staff.

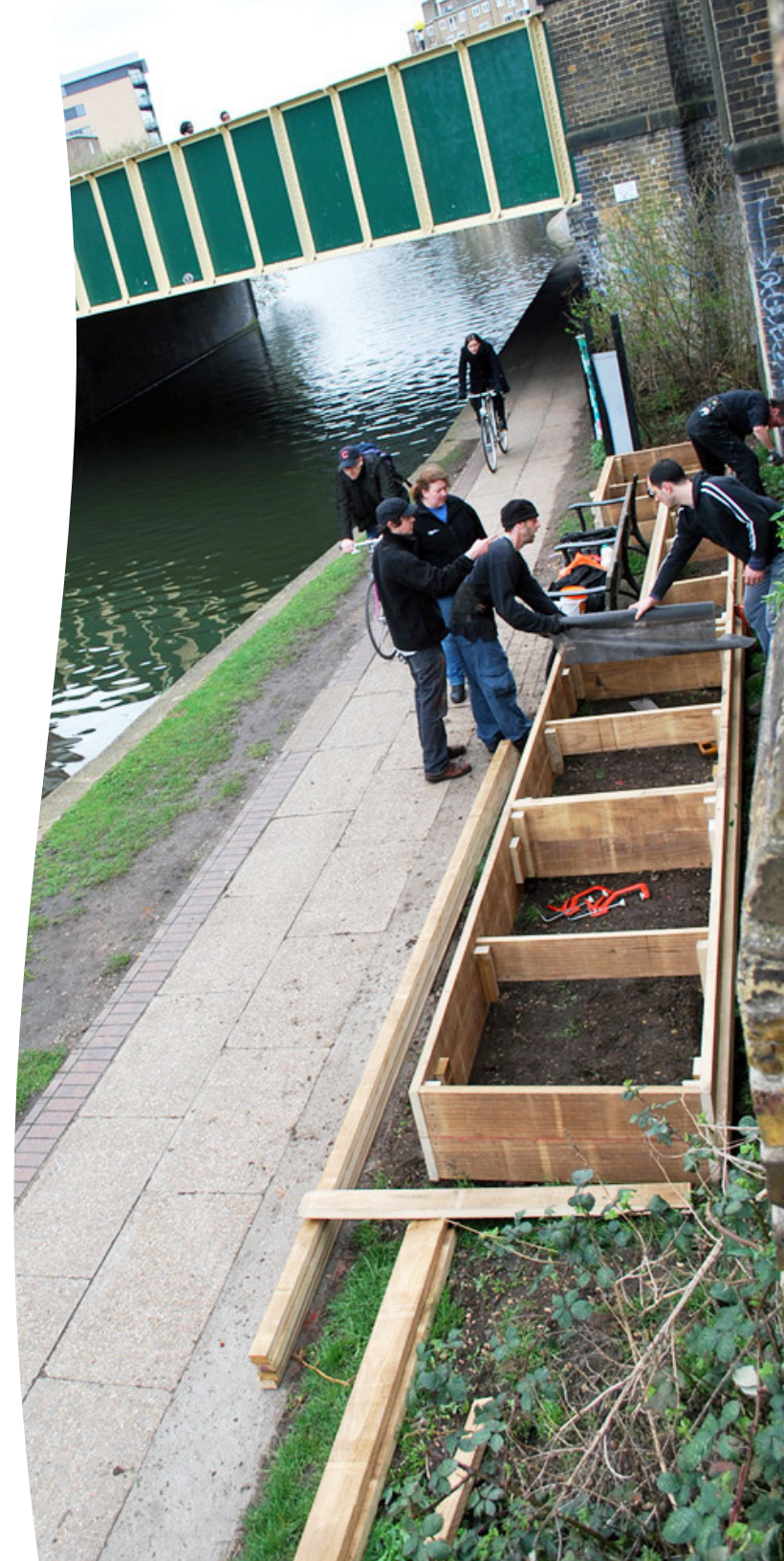
The main day of construction saw the assembly of the bed frames and the filling of the beds with soil and compost. The soil and compost were delivered into the Rosemary Works car park and was then transported across the canal by barge. This was a time consuming and labour intensive task. Close to 20 community members worked all day to make the beds and haul the dirt.

Then came the fun bit – planting! Plants were sourced from a large garden centre. **We are delighted with how they look** and it was a lot of fun for everyone to be finally planting flowers. About 12 of us worked for 3 hours to plant everything.

Was the project successful in meeting its aims?

In April 2010 we were selected as the winner of the community category of the **London Green Corners awards**, awarded by the Conservation Foundation. It was a great acknowledgement of all the hard work we had put in!

All the evidence suggests that the project has been a great success.



1. Beautification of the Area

- Local people and general canal users say that they are pleased to see how the area now looks and appreciate the planting and the artwork. In short, the area looks much better!

The response from the community has been **unanimously very favourable**. A high percentage of canal users stop and speak with us while we are working on the planting area. People consistently say that **they think it looks great and encourage us to keep on going** and to plant up a larger area.

"The canal network that runs through the heart of London brings a slice of countryside to the communities that it connects. The waterways provide a green, traffic-free corridor for thousands of people to walk, cycle, jog and boat along every week, as part of their commute, for leisure or simply for contemplation. British Waterways works in partnership with a number of different groups and organisations to maintain, improve and upgrade the towpaths.

The work that the RoWCA team has completed is a fantastic example of how, when local people get involved, they can enhance and improve the urban canalside environment. The project has really brightened up the towpath, created a new habitat and helped to clean up an area where previously people would drop litter. British Waterways is keen to continue working with RoWCA and see more people become active in looking after their stretch of this fantastic piece of working heritage."

Jon Guest, Waterway Manager, British Waterways

2. Increase in biodiversity

- Lots of different plants growing,
- Increased habitat and food for wildlife

The biodiversity audit we did at the start of the project indicated that there was a very low diversity of plants in the area. We have planted species that will provide **food and habitat for wildlife** and plan to increase this aspect of the planting over time. It is safe to assume that having planted new species and created new habitat there will be a resulting **increase in biodiversity over time**.



3. Community Involvement

- Increased skills in the community especially gardening skills
- Increased levels of volunteering and active citizenship
- Increased inter-group and inter-generational contact

More than 35 people have been involved in the project. For most of them it was their first experience of involvement in either a planting project and a community project. Ages ranged **from 9 to 65**, and there was a wide mix of backgrounds amongst the group. Most of the volunteers have come from RoWCA, but significant contribution has been made from members of the wider community. In particular, **the expert horticultural support has all come from outside of RoWCA** through volunteers we engaged to be part of the project.

"RoWCA should be very proud of their unique project! It is a real inspiration to other community groups, demonstrating what a handful of active volunteers can achieve for the benefit of the local environment and wider community. The project has made the canal more welcoming for the public including commuters and leisure users. We hope the project triggers similar community projects, creating a highway of gardens along London's historic canals!"

James Scipioni, Capital Clean-Up Partnership

The project has already resulted in more than 500 hours of volunteering.

Since the beginning of the project a handful of project volunteers have gained some gardening skills. We will now be developing a training needs assessment for the **remainder of the community** group and will provide training in the areas we identify **necessary**.

The construction and ongoing care provide us with a great opportunity to engage with the wider community on a regular basis. **Many people stop and talk to us while we are working** and we believe that this has an impact on their attitudes about community. Our belief is that seeing something positive happening encourages other people to do something themselves. At the very least it leaves a positive feeling that something is happening and it is possible to make a difference in your area.





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Success Factors and Recommendations

Engagement

Be clear about the needs of the project and look at the skills you have within your group. Then you can go out and engage support to fill any gaps you have (e.g. we needed to engage people with planting experience). It is very helpful to make an engagement plan.

When initially engaging with a local authority or organisation, community groups should have a good understanding of what is being requested of them, approaching the right people in the relevant department. It is important to be clear about what support is being requested and to detail other partners that have been, or intended to be, approached to put the project into context. It is helpful if you can demonstrate that you have previously undertaken other projects, especially if they were in partnership with a recognised body.

Negotiating with big landowners/organisations

- Patience and resilience in the face of the slow pace of development of the project;
- Flexibility to adapt to changing needs and willingness to compromise;

When working with multiple partners or third parties within any area or site (e.g. housing association land, Network Rail, British Waterways), it is helpful to understand that there may be 'grey areas' or associated barriers in respect to the project site. Speak to the most appropriate authority or organisation to understand the circumstances and the relationship between them. It is important to be patient but persistent when dealing with partner organisation, particularly larger ones, where the decision-making process is typically slower.

Building strong relationships with partners and staying in regular communication;

It is good to have one point of contact for the project for all partners, assuming that person can act on behalf of the community group. Whilst it is beneficial to have additional support from partners, it is important to have a consideration of their costs and/or officer time associated with assisting your project .

A clear set of short-term outcomes to focus project activity.

- Starting small and expanding

Project ideas might need to be adapted to match your community group's resources and capabilities whilst also satisfying the funders' criteria and measures of success. Whilst keeping in mind the long-term objectives of the project and what it is trying to achieve, it is helpful to break the project down into stages so that the project goals can be adapted as project partners' understanding and involvement develops.

Whilst being ambitious in your project, it important not to be unrealistic. It is worth considering a plan B for situations where the ideal is not possible or unforeseen barriers arise. It is important to motivate volunteers and partners to maintain momentum throughout the process, especially if there is a barrier to the project's implementation. This requires regular and clear communication.

"It took a lot of time to organise, but was well worth the effort, as in the end we were successful. We really appreciated the support we got from all the partners on the project"

Jonny Zander
Project Manager, RoWCA

"It's been a lot of fun!"

Bertie Palmer, Age 9

"Provide a clear end point and measure of success for the project. If the project is ambitious, phase the project with potential for future work so that a local authority is more receptive both initially and when you return"

Mark Griffin
Head of Waste Management
London Borough of Hackney

Appendix A:

Canal-side Planting and Art Project Logic Model

